

U.S. Senators Introduce Bill to Create a New National Historical Park in the Blackstone Valley
Bill Would Preserve Birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution and Promote Tourism in RI and MA

WASHINGTON, DC – In an effort to preserve the industrial heritage and natural and cultural resources of the Blackstone Valley, and help provide economic development opportunities for the region, U.S. Senators Jack Reed (D-RI), John Kerry (D-MA), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), and Scott Brown (R-MA) today introduced bipartisan legislation to create the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park.

As the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution, this area is a national treasure and includes thousands of acres of beautiful, undeveloped land, and waterways that are home to diverse wildlife.

Following the recommendations of extensive input from local stakeholders and historians, the new multi-site park would encompass land in both Rhode Island and Massachusetts, including the Blackstone River and its tributaries; the Blackstone Canal; the non-contiguous nationally significant historic districts of Old Slater Mill in Pawtucket; the villages of Slatersville (in North Smithfield) and Ashton (in Cumberland) Rhode Island; and Whitinsville and Hopedale in Massachusetts.

“This new national park would provide opportunities for work, opportunities for recreation, and it will be a way to forever memorialize the history of this unique national treasure,” said **Senator Reed**, the Chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior and Environment, which oversees the National Park Service. “Creating a national historical park within the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor could help boost tourism and economic development in the region and preserve and protect these valuable natural and cultural resources for future generations of Americans.”

“The Blackstone River Valley is the place where our Industrial Revolution was born and this piece of our history is at the center of our economic future,” **Senator Kerry** said. “Creating this new national park will attract tourism from across the country. It’s been a long time coming and a lot of pushing to get here, but we always knew, from the moment the Park was first proposed, how important this very special area is for Massachusetts and Rhode Island.”

“The Blackstone River Valley is the historic cradle of Rhode Island – and American – manufacturing, and a beautiful resource for our state,” said **Senator Whitehouse**. “Securing a National Park designation for the area will create jobs now and ensure that this historic corridor is preserved for future generations.”

“The Blackstone River Valley played an important role in the industrial history of Massachusetts,” said **Senator Brown**. “I’m proud to cosponsor this legislation to create this national park and provide new economic development opportunities for our region.”

The National Park Service recently completed a Special Resource Study (SRS) to review whether portions of Blackstone River Valley that contain historical and cultural value would be eligible for potential inclusion as a unit of the National Park System. The study estimated that the new Blackstone Valley national historical park would over time include expenditures of \$6.1 million for construction and rehabilitation of facilities, research, planning, and development of exhibits. The park would have an estimated \$3.5 million annual operating cost.

In August, Senator Reed brought U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar up to Rhode Island to tour the proposed park and meet with local officials and community leaders. During his visit, Secretary Salazar said he strongly supports giving national historic park status to the Old Slater Mill and nearby mill towns in Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

Designated as a National Heritage Corridor in 1986 by Congress, the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor links twenty-four communities along the Blackstone River from Providence, Rhode Island to Worcester, Massachusetts.

If approved by Congress and signed into law by President Obama, the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park likely would be run collaboratively through a special partnership that would allow the National Park Service to manage and operate the facilities and provide educational services in the park in partnership with regional and local preservation groups who would lead the efforts to preserve the surrounding rural and agriculture landscape within the existing corridor.

The Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor was established in 1986. It was twice reauthorized by Congress and renamed for John H. Chafee in 1999. Federal support for the Corridor was expected to sunset in October 2011, at which point the area would have retained its National Heritage Corridor designation, but federal funding would have ended. However, Senator Reed was able to successfully extend the authorization to October 2012 in the final Fiscal Year 2011 continuing resolution signed into law in April; thus keeping the Corridor eligible for an additional year of federal funding.

According to the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, to date, more than \$25 million has been spent on preserving historic buildings, creating museums, constructing visitor centers, and building permanent exhibits in the Heritage Corridor. Since 2002, Senator Reed helped secured over \$11 million in federal funding for the Corridor and an additional \$6.9 million for the Blackstone River Valley Bikeway.

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